

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000156

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/18/2012
TAGS: KCRM PGOV SNAR NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLICE STRUGGLE TO SOLVE IGE MURDER

REF: LAGOS 0060

1.(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for
reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

2.(C/NF) Summary: There has been little progress in solving the December 23 murder of Attorney General Bola Ige. A frank meeting with the head of the police investigation found a group of under-trained and ill-equipped investigators struggling with a complex criminal investigation. With political and public pressure inexorably mounting, the police desperately seek USG assistance. End summary.

3.(C/NF) RNLEO, LEGATT and Assistant LEGATT called on Assistant Inspector General of Police Mrs. Ajimbola Ojomo January 10 to discuss the ongoing investigation into the December 23 assassination of Attorney General Bola Ige. Ojomo, with whom the Embassy has a long-standing and excellent working relationship, was personally picked by President Obasanjo to lead the investigation. She has moved her office from Abuja to Lagos to be nearer to the murder scene and the location of most suspects. The strain of several weeks of continuous work showed in her tired composure.

4.(C/NF) The AIG summoned members of her hand-picked investigative team to join in discussing the case with the USG visitors. The ballistics expert confided that unspent shotgun shells left at the crime scene were not processed for latent fingerprints and were handled by at least six police officials before being placed in a paper envelope and marked as evidence. Similar examples of poor collection and preservation of crime scene evidence were evident, including the removal of the body, the movement of a suitcase that the assailant reportedly opened and searched, and the failure to take fingerprints of the Attorney General to compare with unknown fingerprints found at the crime scene. Mrs. Ojomo candidly expressed disappointment in her team's performance and noted that these deficiencies highlighted the need for advanced training for CID investigators - training that could be provided by the USG, particularly the FBI, in evidence collection and forensic analysis.

5.(C/NF) Ojomo shared the autopsy and ballistics report with FBI agents and summarized the facts of the murder: during the evening of December 23 Ige allowed all members of his police security team to take a dinner break, during which the assailants entered the Ige compound unchallenged. The assailants entered the home, found and forced household staff and Ige's grown children and wife into a room, before killing Ige with a single shotgun blast at near point-blank range. (Note: Ige's son has told Poloff that the assailants had threatened to slaughter all family members. End note) Police investigators believe the assailants searched a suitcase and some bedroom furniture before fleeing. Possible drug- or organized crime-related motives for the murder have been investigated and rejected, claimed the AIG. She disclosed that she had specifically investigated the possibility that two Nigerian drug traffickers arrested in August with 60 kilograms of cocaine - against whose bail the AG personally fought in court - could have had a hand in the murder, but came up blank.

6.(C/NF) The investigators stated that they have interviewed all of those close to Ige, including members

of his security detail. Ojomo revealed that ongoing interviews of potential suspects have focused attention on one political associate of Ige's whose story is inconsistent. This is their most promising suspect, she claimed.

7.(C/NF) Ojomo called on the USG/FBI to provide immediate technical assistance for the investigation, a plea which has been echoed separately by people close to the Ige family. She is particularly interested in the aid of a FBI polygraph machine and polygrapher for interviewing suspects. LEGATT explained to the AIG that he is attempting to find USG funding for the travel and expenses of a visiting FBI polygraph expert; he hope to have some news in the near future.

Responding to a RNLEO query on the veracity of local media reports that the Israeli government had formally offered Mossad's assistance to the police investigation, Ojomo claimed that she had heard of the press report but that she had nothing to confirm it, though she said she would welcome any and all outside assistance. (Note: in a follow-up phone call January 18, Ojomo stated that she never obtained confirmation of an Israeli offer. End note)

8.(C/NF) Comment: The police feel whip-sawed between political pressure to produce a suspect and generating a solid lead in their seemingly stalled case. Emboffs were stunned by the poor quality of this high-profile police investigation. Investigators failed to take the most rudimentary steps to collect and preserve key evidence and forensic specialists seem to have ignored basic tests, such as the examination of unspent shotgun shells and the lifting of fingerprints. These deficiencies were underscored by an offer from Mrs. Ojomo herself to open the envelope containing the gunmen's unspent shells and give these to the FBI agents for examination in her office (which would have further contaminated the evidence). Post concurs with the LEGATT's opinion that, absent a credible confession or outside assistance, the Nigerian investigation will fail to identify the assassin or his paymaster because of the lack of preserved evidence and the weak investigative skills of the police team.

9.(C/NF) Comment Cont'd: The police want to see this investigation yield a successful prosecution and U.S. assistance could assist greatly. Moreover, we believe that support for the Nigerians could have long-term benefits for the United States. We have already approached them once for help in tracking down the suspected movements in Nigeria of one of the WTC terrorists. Their appreciation -- and the skills they are able to absorb -- could be useful to us when we next ask for assistance in the war against terrorism. In 1992 or 1993, the GON rendered Egypt Air hijacker Rezaq to U.S. custody after at least two other countries through which Rezaq was passing declined. Post would appreciate Department's assistance in securing from outside sources the modest funding (about \$10,000) needed to provide FBI assistance to the Nigeria Police. We note that similar FBI assistance has been offered in the recent past to Ghana and Swaziland and that this technical assistance would not involve FBI agents in an operational role.

JETER

Jeter